



Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

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COLD SPRINGS LAKE RENOVATION TOPIC OF MARCH 23 MEETING

LEWIS – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources will discuss plans to renovate the fish population at Cold Springs Lake. The meeting will be held at 7 p.m., March 23 at the community building in Lewis.

Cold Springs Lake is a popular fishing and swimming lake among local residents and will not be lowered for this renovation. At 16 acres, the lake has a stunted population of crappies and a population of grass carp that will not allow aquatic vegetation to take root. The carp also continue to stir up sediment to the point that Cold Springs is in the bottom third of lakes in Iowa in terms of water quality.

“The issue at Cold Springs is stunted fish and carp,” said Chris Larson, fisheries biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources working from the Cold Springs office. “An over abundance of 5-1/2 inch crappies have taken over the lake and are suppressing the largemouth bass and bluegill to the point where there is almost no new fish coming in to the system. These crappies are not growing and fishing continues to decline.”

Larson said crappies currently make up about 70 percent of the fish population. For Cold Springs to be in balance, crappies should comprise only 10 to 20 percent of the fish population.

The renovation is also aimed at removing the grass carp, as well as common carp and other river species flushed in to the lake in 1993 and 1998. "Removing carp should result in improved water quality" Larson said.

"We are going to try to move the larger largemouth bass and channel catfish to other area lakes during our routine sampling this year," Larson said.

Larson is proposing to relax the fishing regulations at Cold Springs beginning April 1, including removing the length and bag limits for channel catfish and largemouth bass and allowing any number of hooks and rods. Anglers must be insight of the fishing rods and must have a fishing license.

The fish population would be renovated in mid-October then restocked in mid to late November. The lake and park will be open to normal uses this year.

For more information, contact Larson at 712-769-2587.

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TROUT HEADED FOR SUMMERSET ON MARCH 10

DES MOINES – The final trout stocking at Summerset State Park until October will be at 12 p.m., March 10. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources will release 1,400 catchable sized rainbow trout in the 59-acre lake.

"If we can get the weather to cooperate, we would like to use a boat to release the fish throughout the lake instead of just at the boat ramp," said Dick McWilliams, fisheries biologist for the DNR.

Banner Lakes at Summerset State Park is the only central Iowa trout fishery. The trout are from the Big Springs hatchery near Elkader. Anglers who want to fish for the trout are required to purchase the trout privilege for \$11 in addition to an Iowa fishing license. The daily bag limit for trout is five and the possession limit is 10.

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WOOD DUCK TRAIL

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Pushing through switchgrass, then dry smartweed, wildlife workers Jim Meier and Todd Rowenhorst stepped into a clearing. In a wet year, they'd be dealing with thin ice

and a foot or so of water. Here, though, a chunk or two of ice and a slippery surface hinted that this wetland on the Hawkeye Wildlife Area would return once the snow or rain ever comes.

"It's definitely dry. We're still hoping for some rain before spring, to fill up some of the (potholes)," observed Meier. The two were making the rounds, checking wood duck nest boxes on the south side of the Hawkeye area, in Johnson County. The dry conditions made it easy for them to walk up to the pole-mounted nest boxes. Predators, too. A few inches of rain would flood the depression...and scores of others around here, making it safer for the wood ducks they were trying to attract.

"This one here has been preyed upon," said Meier, recording the site on his clipboard. The entrance to the wooden box had been clawed and chewed to create a larger opening; probably last spring, as a raccoon, mink or other predator made a meal out of the eggs inside. "We can tell the eggshells inside were smashed more (than if ducks had broken them open from inside)."

A couple hundred yards away, at another nest, he showed me the signs of success. Several half shells and membranes indicated ducklings had hatched. A couple unhatched eggs, even a tiny dead wood duckling were further evidence. If the box had been preyed upon, those would be eaten. "It might be that a dozen were hatched out. It looks good," noted Meier. "A lot of times, it averages eight to 12 eggs. Sometimes, there will be up to 20 in a nest."

Late each winter, Meier makes the rounds of these boxes...and 300 others that have been erected over the years on public wildlife areas in his five county wildlife unit. Across Iowa, more workers and volunteers repeat the scene. The nest box program is credited, in large part, for the comeback of the wood duck over the last 30 years or so. Loss of lowland woodlands eliminated natural tree cavities used by 'woodies' for nests each year. Wood duck numbers plummeted in the mid 20th Century; but have steadily returned now to the point that wood ducks are the second or third most common duck bagged by Iowa hunters.

On the late winter rounds, Meier and Rowenhorst scoop out old sawdust, eggshells and litter from invading starlings, squirrels, owls and other critters. In go a couple fresh scoops of fresh sawdust. Wood ducks are early nesters and males are beginning to make the rounds, scouting out suitable territories. Occasionally, field repairs are needed. Meier nails a spare board into place over a hole ripped in the side of an old box. Not good as new, but it would last another year. New boxes would be built, back at the shop.

Success rates vary from year to year. "We're probably at 35 percent usage from '05," observed Meier. "We have had up to 60 to 70 percent in some years. I'm not sure why. Sometimes there's competition for the boxes." Several other factors; from dry conditions to a local increase in predators could catch part of the blame, too. Even 35 percent success rates, though, mean more wood ducks on the area and spreading to other

wetlands. Wood ducks that would not have been there, without a human hand crafting the nest spaces they need.

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VOLUNTEERISM BLOOMING IN IOWA STATE PARKS

DES MOINES – A spring bloom of volunteer opportunities will arrive in Iowa state parks this month, with service projects planned across the state.

Keepers of the Land, the volunteer program within the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR), encourages all Iowans to join these efforts to improve Iowa's state parks.

- Help maintain the Volga River State Recreation Area trail system by removing hazards, trimming branches, mowing grass and performing other tasks. Contact Tom Halverson at (563) 425-4161 or at Volga_River@dnr.state.ia.us for more details.
- Lend a handy helping hand to construction projects at Wildcat Den State Park and Fairport Recreation Area. Park buildings could use new roofing and siding. A kiosk needs to be constructed and park entrances are calling for new entrance portals. Contact Jim Ohl at (563) 263-4337 or at Jim.Ohl@dnr.state.ia.us for more details.
- Join other park enthusiasts for Trail Restoration Day at Lake Icaria, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday, March 11. Lake Icaria, near Corning, needs volunteers to help prepare for coming trail improvements. Contact Brandon Lyddon at (641) 743-6124 or at Brandon.Lyddon@dnr.state.ia.us for more details.
- More enhancement projects, prairie rescues and cleanups will sweep through state parks in April. Visit our website at www.keepersoftheland.org for more information about these and other events, including an on-line event calendar.

Finally, especially dedicated volunteers have the opportunity to serve a favorite state park throughout the busy spring and summer camping season. The following sites need one or more campground hosts, who are volunteers and live and serve on campgrounds, offering assistance to visitors: Beeds Lake, Green Valley, Lake Macbride, Prairie Rose and Wilson Island state parks, as well as Stephens State Forest campground.

For more information, contact Merry Rankin at (515) 281-0878 or at Merry.Rankin@dnr.state.ia.us.

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SURF THE INTERNET FOR TREES THIS SPRING

A new, convenient and reliable source for information on tree planting is now available on the Internet at www.iowatreeplanting.com.

“We developed iowatreeplanting.com to be a one stop source for information for people who want to plant hundreds of trees on their acreage or one tree in their yard,” said John Walkowiak, chief of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources forestry bureau. “Iowatreeplanting.com promotes using native trees and shrubs for conservation and landscaping purposes and has a complete listing of Iowa’s native woody plants, along with a complete listing of Iowa public and private nursery sources.”

Information on iowatreeplanting.com was developed by foresters and state biologists and includes tips on creating wildlife habitat and protecting water quality. The site includes information on how to plant and care for new trees. The website will continue to add practical landscape and habitat designs people can use.

“Most nurseries operate on a first come first served basis so those who wait until the last minute to plan their plantings may find a limited selection of trees available,” Walkowiak said. “Start planning now and investigate plant availability and prices and www.iowatreeplanting.com is a perfect place to start.”

For more information, contact Walkowiak at 515-242-5966.

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